



The 21st Navajo Nation Council

Contact: Alastair L. Bitsoi, Public Information Officer

Phone: (928) 871-6384

Cell: (928) 255-2943

Fax: (928) 871-7255

abitsoi@navajo.org

www.navajonationcouncil.org

September 21, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Education Committee hears report on SIPI's candidacy for reaccreditation, Navajo scholarship policy only funds regionally accredited schools

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Tuesday, the Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) went before the Education Committee to report on its accreditation status at the request of Honorable Leonard Anthony. Anthony requested a report because SIPI's accreditation status has resulted in zero scholarship and financial assistance offered by the Navajo Nation to Navajo students attending the school.

"I do not know what the Navajo Nation's status is regarding language related to SIPI's accreditation status," Anthony (Shiprock) said, explaining the reason for SIPI's report. "If a student is eligible to receive a scholarship from the Navajo Nation shouldn't he or she receive that scholarship regardless?"

Dr. Sherry Allison, president of SIPI, said the institute is currently in the "candidate" phase of reacquiring full accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association. On July 2, the HLC notified SIPI officials of its change to "candidate for accreditation" status following a review and evaluation period that examined the institution's record from 2000 to 2010.

The HLC accredits degree-granting post-secondary institutions and requires post-secondary institutions to meet the following requirements for accreditation: mission and integrity; preparing for the future; student learning and effective teaching; acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge and engagement and service. Of the criterion, SIPI failed to meet four standards and was imposed the sanction of "candidate for accreditation" on July 2.

"When the HLC comes to your school they want to see records and we had problems with that," Dr. Allison said. "SIPI was not able to prove we met the requirements for accreditation. We do have what we call an accreditation room, so we will be ready for the HLC visit in the spring."

A HLC evaluation team is scheduled to visit SIPI in March 2011 to determine whether SIPI continues to meet the eligibility requirements for "candidate for accreditation" and whether SIPI is making progress toward meeting the criteria for accreditation.

Despite SIPI's accreditation status, it still has high enrollment. For spring 2010, SIPI had a student population of 673 students and in fall 2010 had a decreased enrollment of 547 students. Currently, the institute has a Navajo student population of 340 students with the Navajo Nation providing scholarship and financial assistance to about 90 students.

"Our enrollment did go down which is attributed to our accreditation," Allison added. "Even though enrollment dropped, we still have a record number of students." Allison also said funding to operate the institute remained the same and the only lost of funding source was for Navajo students.

Rose Graham, director for the Navajo Scholarship Office, said the Navajo Nation Scholarship Office does not fund schools that are not regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission.

- more -

Page 2-2-2/ Bitsoi/ Education Committee hears report on SIPI's candidacy for reaccreditation

In a July 14 news release, Graham said: "The Navajo Scholarship Office is regrettably compelled to exclude all students planning to attend SIPI from funding until such time that SIPI regains its accreditation from a regional accrediting association."

"This is what the policy says and we will follow the policy," Graham added. "As the Education Committee is aware, they have the authority to change the rules on scholarship policies."

Graham provided examples of Navajo students who attended schools lacking regional accreditation from the HLC.

"In the past, some students were funded by nationally accredited schools and entered into contracts and one day the school was gone," she said, "these students had all sorts of bills and had to continue to pay for those bills. The other experience is that credits are not accepted at regionally accredited schools from non-regionally accredited institutions. Those are the reasons why the Navajo Nation funds regionally accredited schools."

Honorable Willie Tracy asked Dr. Allison if she came to the committee in hopes of amending the Navajo Nation Scholarship Policy to provide the institution with funding and if credits and degrees under candidate status held weight.

"In terms of funding, we cannot lobby," Allison said. "In order to keep candidacy status, we have to offer degrees and graduate students."

"It is up to the receiving college to accept our credits," added Joseph Carpio, Director of Admissions and Financial Aid. "We are still awarding degrees, so we are continuing forward."

The Council of University Presidents, New Mexico Association of Community Colleges and New Mexico Independent Community Colleges have agreed to transfer credit and articulation agreements with SIPI during its process in reacquiring accreditation. The University of New Mexico, New Mexico State University, UNM-Gallup and San Juan College among other institutions will continue to receive transfer credits from SIPI.

SIPI officials anticipate by fall 2011 to have an answer on its accreditation status, which normally is a one to four year process. Assistant Secretary of Interior Larry Echohawk is also collaborating with the Bureau of Indian Education and Dr. Allison in an effort to get SIPI's full accreditation within a year.

"We would like to see accreditation as soon as possible," stated Honorable Raymond Maxx. "It is good the Bureau is behind you 100 percent in an effort to get back to accreditation status. I do not know how we can help but we can offer our encouragement."

SIPI is a community college, funded through the Bureau of Indian Education, U.S. Department of the Interior, and was established at the request of the All Indian Pueblo Council and other federally recognized tribes, including the Navajo Nation to help train American Indians and Alaskan Natives for jobs. Currently, SIPI provides technical training and transfer degree programs to all 550 federal recognized tribes.

The committee unanimously accepted SIPI's report, 6-0. For more information on SIPI's accreditation process, please visit www.sipi.edu/accreditation.

###